

NEW MUSIC CONCERTS
ROBERT AITKEN ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

20th ANNIVERSARY

1990-91 SEASON

New Music Concerts

LIGETI & 'STRANGE COMPANIONS'

PREMIERE DANCE THEATRE
8 pm Sunday, October 28, 1990

Guest composer **Claudio Pimpli**, born in Gorizia, Italy in 1949, is Lecturer in Composition at the Music Department of the University of New England, Armidale (Australia). He studied with Richard Meale, Bozidar Kos and Tristram Cary at the Elder Conservatorium of Music in Adelaide, as well as frequenting composition courses held by maestri Franco Donatoni and Salvatore Sciarrino during his period of study in Italy from 1984-86. Composition awards include the Alex Burnard Scholarship (1983), and the Italian Government Scholarship (1984). While employing both traditional and electronic media, his interests lie in the areas of music notation, computer-assisted music printing and performance, music in film and theatre, and video art.

In recent years, Pompili's commissioned works have spanned the genres of theatrical, electronic, computer and chamber musics. During 1990, he has completed an intriguing range of commissioned compositions: *Zeitfluss* for wind quintet (Adolf Spivakovsky Scholarship for the composition of music 1990), *Scherzo alla Francescana* for double-bass solo, and *Lo spazio stellato si riflette in suoni...* (also arranged for bass clarinet). Currently, he is completing two further commissions for the ensembles *Perihelion* and *Duo Contemporain*.

Lo specchio del fiore (The Mirror of the Flower, 1988), for baroque flute, was written for Elissa Poole. Made out of wood or ivory, the baroque flute sounds quite different from the modern silver flute, notably in its gentler, richer tone colour and in its ability to negotiate subtleties of tone and tuning, due in part to its simpler construction. The melodic style of this work is related most closely to rather diverse sources: baroque opera, Japanese Noh theatre, and the music of Maurice Ravel. While suited to the baroque flute, the virtuosic nature of the composition nonetheless demands the use of techniques which push the instrument to its musical limits.

The inspiration behind ***Lo spazio stellato si riflette in suoni...*** (Starry Space is Reflected in Sounds..., 1990), lies in the imagery and energy of the films produced by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, in particular, his brand of surrealism, characterized by "distancing" techniques such as the use of mirrors, stylised movements, colour filters and archetypal characters. Each level of filmic reality is masked by a false front: paradox and illusion are the primary constructs towards an aesthetic of heightened reality. In the aesthetic playground of this composition Fassbinder's influence is further imbued by personal experiences of 60's and 70's rock culture.

The composition, *Lo spazio...*, is an essay primarily concerned with the concepts of rhythm and melodic streaming. The work is in three main sections: the first is meant to convey the high-energy motor rhythm and syncopations of pop music, the middle section is gestural in nature with drum and flute solos and the last section sees the marimba paraphrasing the material of the first section with the flute in cantilena movement weaving and soaring over the marimba.

In the first section of the piece, the baroque flute is set in a manner that represents the opposite of sentimentality and the expectations of pastoral lyricism. The energy of the breath and characteristic articulations of the flute are employed in a paradoxical way in order to create high-energy strata of sound. The protagonist of this section, the flute, has an *alter ego* - the marimba (in the last section). The middle section begins with a flamboyant percussion interlude: a *pianissimo* crescendo roll on the snare drum. It is my way of paying homage to the bluesman, Keef Hartley and a particularly memorable drum solo in the Birmingham Town Hall, England, 1971. The section continues with expressive interplay between the flute and percussion.

Claudio Pompili

Armidale, September 1990

John Abram, born in England in 1959, studied mathematics and music there before moving to Canada, where he studied with Rudolf Komorous, amongst others. Abram's music emphasizes exotic combinations of instruments, sometimes involving early instruments such as recorder, baroque strings, and baroque winds contrasted with modern board instruments (organ, guitar), or percussion. Currently, he is also active as a member of the Drystone Orchestra.

Aeneld Music consists of twelve pieces which form the long central section of Abram's 1988 opera based on Vergil's well-known epic poem. Fifth in the series, the piece on this program features a unique combination of baroque flute, prepared guitar, slit drum, and tape. The guitar has been 'prepared', or altered, by alligator clips placed on the strings, thus modifying the instrument's harmonics. Although the instruments called for belong to an anachronistic ensemble, their sound combinations transcend such logical limitations.

Christopher Butterfield was born 1952 in Victoria B.C. His creative activities have been far-ranging, including performance art, sound poetry, singing and playing in a rock group, teaching, and composing. In addition to writing music for many Canadian performing groups, Butterfield has worked in several leading capacities on operas and music spectacles. One of his prime concerns as composer is the large issue of relationships between simplicity and complexity, which leads, he says, to a deliberate awkward tension in his work.

Written for the duo '*Strange Companions*', ***Flamingo Limo*** (1988), for baroque flute and vibraphone, takes musical advantage of the instruments' different tunings. The vibraphone is fixed in 12-note equal temperament at approximately A 440, while the flute uses a different tuning of A 415. Moreover, in this piece the flutist must negotiate quarter-tones in two of its seven short movements. Five of the movements are developmental in character, whereas two serve as interludes.

A note on György Ligeti and his *Piano Concerto*

by Paul Rapoport

For over 30 years, György Ligeti (born in Transylvania in 1923) has been one of the world's leading composers. His music has gone through several stages, including eastern European nationalism (e.g. his works before 1956), post-serialism (*Atmosphères*), micropolyphony (*Lux æterna*), transparent polyphony (*Melodien*), surrealism (*Le grand macabre*), ironic tonality (*Passacaglia ungherese*), and other concepts yet unnamed. But names and categories are misleading, for they involve much more than the basic things they have come to imply. Moreover, various techniques and styles occur together in Ligeti's music, transformed into procedures and entities which it would be folly to label.

Throughout his work, however, runs a complex net of musical illusion. This is not the equivalent of *trompe-l'oeil* or conjuring tricks, although such things appear in his music too. The illusions operate on many levels. They may involve the creation of shapes and textures from individual items which have little meaning on their own, their effect resulting only from their combinations. One simple example: particular tone-colours resulting from many scarcely distinguishable melodic lines sounding together (*Requiem*). Another: deliberately mistuned music resulting, oddly enough, from very simple, supposedly discrete tunings (*Ramifications*).

On a deeper level, Ligeti's illusions deal with basic issues: the nature of order and disorder, the perverse interaction of extremes, the merging of the real and the imagined, the inner workings of complex beings and objects, the immanent qualities of time. Sometimes these issues are treated with detachment, in displays of grotesque humour with sinister undercurrents (*Aventures, Nouvelles aventures*). Sometimes they bring forth stunning virtuosity in the service of wild contrasts (*String Quartet No.2*). Or they may involve a wealth of allusions whose elusiveness adds to their depth (*Horn Trio*). Although adducing examples like this hardly does them justice, intrigued readers know where to find some very fine music.

One immediate antecedent of his *Piano Concerto* (1985-88) is Ligeti's *Six Etudes for Piano* of 1985, but we may also look to Bartók and Schumann, Nancarrow and Ives, electronic and tribal African music. A normal small orchestra is augmented by unusual instruments, some to be mentioned shortly. The pianist's role is virtuosic throughout, but as an ensemble leader, not as the separate voice of most classical or romantic concertos. To say this concerto is difficult rhythmically (for everyone) is to say that a galaxy contains many stars. Let us observe this galaxy a bit...

Although the first movement is built out of a contrast between meters of 12/8 and 4/4, the irregular accents and phrasings soon conceal any overall meter. So, too, the simple pitch structures articulated by the right and left hands of the pianist merge into a total *Gestalt* which becomes part of the music's *moto perpetuo*. The music evolves into various planes which themselves scarcely evolve at all: the kaleidoscope is dynamically static. Occasionally we may catch a natural high harmonic in the brass added to the furor.

The second movement begins simply, with a false sense of normalcy. Piccolo in its lowest register seems acceptable, but combined with bassoon in its highest? Their fragments are soon imitated by a weird circus of instruments: slide whistle, brass with Harmon mutes, alto ocarina. With the help of a flexatone, the music hurtles into general screeching (*stridente*), ultimately to subside with clarinet and harmonica. A symmetrical 9-note scale penetrates, directs, and hovers.

In the third movement, the piano again goes into perpetual motion, but at times its fastest lines are inaudible as lines. Some irregular accentual patterns (mostly in the piano) bring out what Ligeti refers to tellingly as illusionary rhythmic-melodic shapes, a kind of converse to his micropolyphony. The pitch structures of this movement increase in variety as Ligeti divides the 12-note octave into its four basic scales of equidistant intervals as well as various mixed modal scales. This borders on microtonality without microtones. Ligeti notes, "I did not want to retune the piano."

The rhythms of three-versus-two are less obvious in the fourth movement, but development of instrumental strata is more prominent than in the other movements. In increasing density, fragments recur which we may think we recognize but which continue to elide and collude, collide and elude. These fractals of sound (Ligeti's term) develop a wildly gesticulating climax which finally lessens only dynamically: textural and timbral variegation remain. The kaleidoscope is statically dynamic.

OCTOBER 28, 1990 8 PM
PREMIERE DANCE THEATRE

PROGRAM

JOHN ABRAM (Canada)

Æneld Music V *

(1988 - new version 1990)

c.9'

Elissa Poole
John Abram
Rick Sacks
Christopher Butterfield

baroque flute
guitar
slit drum
ghetto blaster

CHRISTOPHER BUTTERFIELD
(Canada)

Flamingo Limo

(1988)

c.7'

Elissa Poole
Rick Sacks

baroque flute
vibraphone

CLAUDIO POMPILI
(Australia)

***Lo spazio stellato si
riflette in suoni... ****

(1990)

c.27'

Elissa Poole
Rick Sacks

baroque flute
percussion

INTERMISSION

CLAUDIO POMPILI

Lo specchio del fiore

(1988)

c.10'

Elissa Poole

baroque flute

GYORGY LIGETI (Hungary/Germany)

Piano Concerto +

(1986-88)

c.21'

Pierre-Laurent Aimard

solo piano

Douglas Stewart

flute, piccolo

Cynthia Steljes

oboe

Stanley McCartney

clarinet

Peter Lutek

bassoon

Joan Watson

French horn

James Spragg

trumpet

Gordon Sweeney

trombone

Trevor Tureski

percussion

Fujiko Imaishi

violin

Marie Bérard

violin

Douglas Perry

viola

David Hetherington

cello

Roberto Occhipinti

double bass

Robert Aitken

conductor

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+ Canadian Premiere

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The last movement proceeds in the manner of movements 1 and 3, and also develops ideas from movements 2 and 4. Its *moto* is not quite *perpetuo*; its transformations come so thick and fast that many can scarcely be perceived. Towards the middle of this quasi-ordered quasi-chaos come rushing scales punctuated by percussive chords, leading to an anti-cadenza for the piano. Glittering yet harsh, the movement stops but does not really conclude. Relation and expectation receive their final upset, process is cancelled, the kaleidoscope disappears. The music has become an object, and time itself the great illusion.

Tonight's performers

Guest pianist **Pierre-Laurent Aimard** studied at the Paris Conservatory with Yvonne Loriod and Maria Curcio. Since then, he has performed with major orchestras in more than 30 countries under conductors such as Pierre Boulez, Sergiu Celibidache, and Seiji Ozawa. Aimard's gift for and interest in new music have led him to work with an impressive array of contemporary composers: among others, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Olivier Messiaen, Ligeti, and Boulez. In addition to his career as soloist, he performs as a member of Boulez's renowned *Ensemble intercontemporain*.

Strange Companions, the duo of **Elissa Poole** and **Richard Sacks**, explores the multiple resonances of instruments having conflicting traditions and connections. Their collaborations have included jazz, baroque stylization, non-Western folk music, and performance art. *Strange Companions'* new CD will be released in the spring of 1991.

Elissa Poole, baroque flutist, is a member of the Boccherini Quartet, artistic director of *Les Coucous bénévoles*, and a regular in the *Tafelmusik* baroque orchestra. She has made recordings and broadcasts in several countries and has been artist in residence at the University of New England, Australia. A special interest in contemporary music has inspired Ms. Poole to commission and premiere many new pieces for early instruments.

Richard Sacks, percussionist, has performed and toured all over the world with a wide variety of groups, including the New Jersey Percussion Ensemble, Arraymusic, New Music Concerts, the Canadian Electronic Ensemble, the Esprit Orchestra, the Flaming Donos, and the Glass Orchestra. Recent engagements have included a tour with *Le Groupe de la Place royale* and a solo performance of his multi-media work, *Micro-Midi-Macro*.



1990-91
CONCERT
SEASON

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* Contest is open to Canadian citizens or Landed Immigrants born **on or after January 27, 1956.**

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